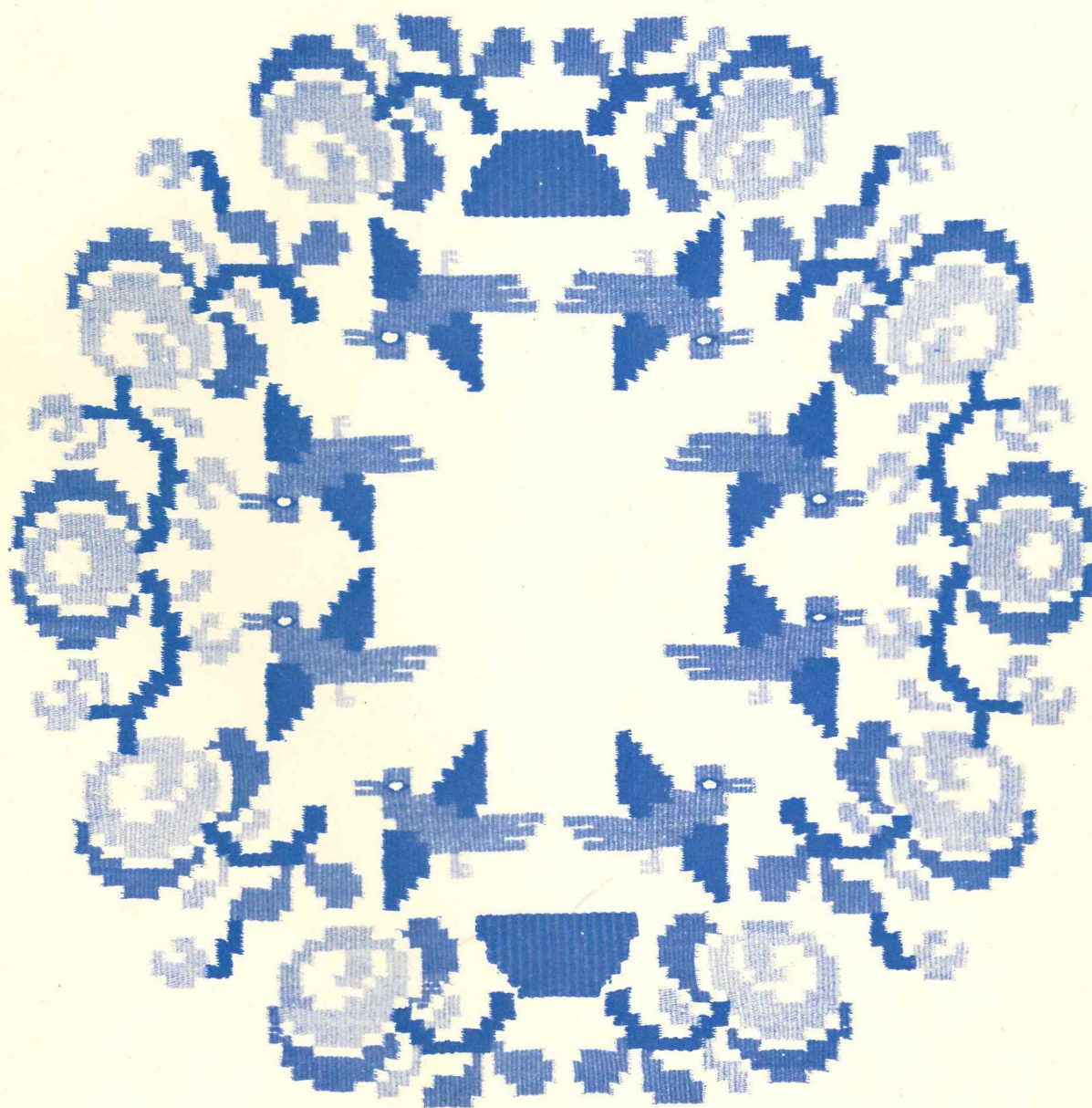


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# TEXTILE MUSEUM JOURNAL

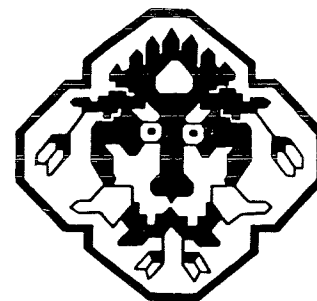


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Cover—Detail of Guadalajara rug, Mexico (Fig. 6 in  
"Folk Textiles of Latin America" by Pál Kelemen)

Photographs in the Kelemen article for Figures 2 and 6  
are by Allen C. Marceron and for Figures 3-5, 10, 14 and  
23 by Col. Osmund L. Varela.  
Photographs in the Berliner article for Figures 2-10, 14,

18 and 19 are by Col. Osmund L. Varela, and photographs  
for Figures 11-13 by Allen C. Marceron. The drawing for  
Figure 17 is by Milton F. Sonday (as is also the sym-  
bolic head on the Contents page and back of the cover).



Fig. 1 Murillo's "Marriage Feast at Cana," painted in 1650. Courtesy of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham, England

## A CHINESE TEXTILE IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY SPAIN

SCHUYLER CAMMANN

The last issue of the *Textile Museum Journal* contained an article discussing the Spanish silk trade with China, via Manila, beginning in the late Sixteenth century, a commerce which provided the Spanish possessions in the New World with fine Chinese textiles, and eventually led to the appearance of Chinese motifs in the tapestries of Colonial

Peru.<sup>1</sup> In response to this article, a number of readers wrote letters offering further information on this subject. One of these was from the noted English Orientalist Sir Harry Garner, enclosing a postcard reproduction of the painting illustrated in Fig. 1, calling attention to the Chinese design on the lower tablecloth at the left of the picture.

This painting, by Bartolome Esteban Murillo (1617-1682), represents The Marriage Feast at Cana, when Jesus performed his first miracle by turning water into wine, and it is said to have been painted in Seville in 1650.<sup>2</sup> It now hangs in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, at the University of Birmingham. Sir Harry wrote that when he had first seen this painting there, some nine years ago, he had realized that the design on the tablecloth was obviously Chinese, and doubtless could provide evidence for the early export of Chinese silks to Europe; but he generously offered to turn the subject over to me, to investigate further. At his suggestion, I wrote to the Barber Institute, and its Director, Professor Waterhouse, kindly provided the two photographs of the painting which are reproduced here. Then, in June, I happened to be in England and took advantage of the opportunity to visit the Barber Institute to inspect the original work.

Very clearly the pattern on the tablecloth was of Chinese origin, and it must have been inspired by one of the Ming badges of rank popularly known as "mandarin squares." Only a textile of that particular type would have presented the elements of design found on the tablecloth, in that particular combination.

### The Ming "Mandarin Squares"

The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) was founded after the Mongol rulers of the previous dynasty, the Yüan, had been driven from North China. For a few years, while it was consolidating its power, the new government continued the old Court regulations and the official costume of the previous regime, with few changes; then when it felt strong enough to assert itself, it issued new laws reacting against the alien ways of the Mongols, stressing a return to traditional Chinese ways and older forms of Chinese dress. This was not entirely a reversion to ancient forms. One of the numerous innovations was a new method for designating rank on the informal robes of the nobles and officials, and their wives. Whereas the Yüan Mongols had worn on the upper part of their robes—and often on a band across the skirt, as well—patterns of birds and animals, for mere decoration, the Ming rulers decided that similar patterns should be placed on the chest and back of the scarlet robes worn by nobles and officials for ordinary use (except for court and ceremonial functions) as definite badges of rank.<sup>3</sup> To this end, specific birds were assigned to the various ranks of civil officials, and particular animals to the nobles and military officers.<sup>4</sup>

The textiles bearing these insignia were stretched across the front and back of the robe, from side-seam to side-seam. It was because the two plaques were roughly rectangular, and because in the following dynasty the equivalent badges were always completely square, that these came to be known as "mandarin squares," although the term is only strictly appropriate for the later

variety. They were worked in different techniques: the particular one often being dictated by seasonal requirements. For example, on summer robes, which were frequently made of silk gauze, the squares were often embroidered directly on the base fabric. On spring and autumn robes, they might be brocaded on heavier silk cloth. Then, for the winter robes, they were generally embroidered on separate pieces of heavy cloth which would then be attached to chest and back of the robe to provide an additional layer for warmth.<sup>5</sup> Some of these winter squares were quite thick and stiff, especially when they had backgrounds of laid gold thread.

On the earlier Ming squares, the birds and animals were displayed in a rather indiscriminate fashion, according to the wearer's personal taste. The birds usually appeared in pairs, to achieve a balanced pattern; but sometimes as many as three were included on the same badge, the front and back plaques being identical in pattern. At first, too, several animals might be shown on one badge; but then—in order to enhance the fierce appearance of the beasts, to make them more appropriate for the insignia of military officers—they began to use only a single, large animal. It was soon apparent that this made the badges more easy to recognize at a distance, and ease in recognition was an important consideration for insignia, so as time went on the civil officials began to use single birds as well, posing them in a rather rigid heraldic stance, so that their chief points of recognition could be seen at a glance.

Also, with a view to easy recognition, from the very beginning, both birds and animals were greatly simplified in form and coloring, so that they could be quickly identified on sight.<sup>6</sup> For example, the stylized Silver Pheasant, which had been assigned to the fifth rank civil officials, was so altered that it bore almost no resemblance to the actual bird of that name. In Nature, the male Silver Pheasant has a prominent nuchal crest of purple black, and a chest and stomach of the same color, while its upper parts are stippled or lined with black. Furthermore, its face and the sides of its head are bare, appearing as brilliant red.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, the highly conventionalized silver pheasant on the Ming badges was almost entirely white, except for a dark blue crest, and its tail plumes were represented as widely separated, to distinguish it from the golden pheasant which was usually shown with two closely-set, parallel tail feathers. Such changes of form were important, to supplement changes in coloring; because when badges were embroidered or brocaded in gold or silver threads the color distinctions were lost. As the resulting conventionalization of the Silver Pheasant was an unreal, purely symbolic creature, intended solely as a mark to distinguish a certain rank of official, it did not appear on other forms of textiles where birds would figure in the decoration, but was used on the mandarin squares alone. This point has special significance in relation to



Fig. 2 Detail of tablecloth in Murillo's painting. Courtesy of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham

Murillo's painting, where the bird on the tablecloth is a Ming-style Silver Pheasant. (Fig. 2)

In Early Ming, the birds or animals were generally disposed against naturalistic backgrounds showing land and sky; but gradually the backgrounds, too, became formalized to show a conventionalized sea, land (often represented by a mere rock, on which the bird or animal stood), and a cloud-filled sky. Thus, the entire badge would represent a kind of symbolic "universe in microcosm." Even the rock that represented the land underwent a stylistic evolution, until it sometimes achieved the completely unnatural form that was represented by Murillo; although this form of rock was somewhat rarer on the squares.

#### The Ch'ing Mandarin Squares

When the Manchus came down into China in 1644, in response to a request from the Chinese to help drive out a usurper who had seized the Ming

throne, they gradually took over the whole country, and stayed on as rulers of a new dynasty called the Ch'ing (1644-1912). The invaders brought with them an entirely different costume tradition, more akin to that of the Yüan Mongols. Like the latter, they stressed the importance of a "practical" attire, suitable for a warrior nation of horsemen and archers. Thus, they preferred narrower robes, tightly-belted at the waist, with close-fitting sleeves, in contrast to the very full, flowing garments of the Ming courtiers and officials.<sup>8</sup>

For seven years, while they were engaged in conquering their new realm, they allowed the Chinese officials in their service to continue wearing the old Ming-style robes—just as the Ming had for a while continued to use the costume of the Yüan. Then, in 1652, when they had gained sufficient control to feel secure in their power, they issued their own laws, requiring all officials to appear in Manchu dress.<sup>9</sup>

The new laws retained the system of patterns for chest and back as a means of identifying ranks, but they altered some of the designs, as well as the means of wearing the badges. In the first place, instead of having the patterns extending across the chest and back of their informal robes, they shifted these to an outer jacket, called a *p'u-fu*, which could be worn over any kind of robe, from the most formal court robes to the most casual ordinary ones. Then, they confined the patterns to actual squares of cloth, about twelve inches on a side, framed by an ornamental border, so that they could now more accurately be called "mandarin squares." Generally these were made detachable, so that they could be more easily shifted to another jacket, as needed. Furthermore, as the *p'u-fu* jacket opened down the front, the front square had to be split in two vertically, at the center, while the rear one was made in a single piece (See Fig. 3)

After a short time, the Ch'ing Court introduced another stylistic innovation, adding to the old Ming patterns a sun disk, toward which the bird or animal was made to face, in order to symbolize the official looking up to his Emperor. All the principal characteristics of the fully-developed Early Ch'ing style are illustrated in the mandarin square shown in Fig. 4, which represents the type worn in China after 1662.<sup>10</sup>

This Early Ch'ing mandarin square shows a Silver Pheasant disposed in heraldic fashion, presented in the bold style of the Late Ming, but slightly diminished in size. We note, too, a lightening of the former dark crest, and a slightly different convention of the tail feathers. (The latter were changed again, within two decades.) Moreover, it has another form of stylized rock as a perch for the bird, although this, too, evolved from a late Ming type; but the water portion, or symbolic Sea is still represented in the same convention of sharply curving waves, and the clouds retain some of the characteristic Late Ming forms, although they have been somewhat thinned out to leave more room for the background of shimmering gold. Note also that the waves on this Ch'ing mandarin square have wealth symbols projecting from them. The Late Ming squares generally had similar symbols jutting from the waves, in recognition of a traditional belief that the Sea was a mythical source of wealth.

#### Murillo's Source of Inspiration

Returning to Murillo's tablecloth, it should now be clear that its pattern was derived from Late Ming mandarin squares. We see on it the Silver Pheasant stylized in accordance with Ming tradition, in the form that was used only on the fifth-rank civil insignia, perched on a stylized rock in a surging sea as were the birds on the official insignia. If the wealth symbols were present on the original piece copied by Murillo, it is most unlikely that he would have realized what they meant, so it is quite understandable that he could



Fig. 3 *An Early Ch'ing Mandarin Square, worn by a 1st rank official. A portrait in the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto*

have omitted them as non-essential elements.

This is not to imply that Murillo was copying an actual tablecloth edged with a wide border composed of Ming mandarin squares, as the painting might at first suggest. For it seems improbable that at the early date of 1650 enough Ming mandarin squares of the same rank could yet have come out of China to provide a repeating edge for a rather large table cloth. It would be more plausible to assume that Murillo had seen only one Ming mandarin square—or perhaps a pair—and was thus inspired to paint a continuous pattern derived from it, to provide an exotic and highly decorative element for the festal scene, which at the same time would stress the Oriental aspect of the setting. If this hypothesis is correct, the tablecloth in Murillo's painting not only provides us with evidence for the presence of a Ming mandarin square in Sixteenth-century Spain, but it also may afford another clue to the working methods of one of Spain's greatest artists.

How would a Ming mandarin square have reached Seville in time to be seen by Murillo in 1650? It could have come to Manila in the silk trade from the China coast—although mandarin





**Fig. 4** *An Early Ch'ing Mandarin Square: 5th rank, Silver Pheasant. Mounted on a Tibetan painting in the American Museum of Natural History, New York City*

squares probably did not constitute a regular item of this commerce until the Ming ones were discarded as completely obsolete, after 1652—or it could have been brought to Manila directly, by some Ming official fleeing from the Manchu invaders after 1644. Once having reached Manila, the piece could have been acquired by some dignitary in one of the great Franciscan mission houses, and sent back to his home base, the great monastery of San Francisco in Seville, where Murillo was doing a series of paintings in the late 1640's. Even more likely, the textile could have been brought from China—and perhaps sent on directly to Seville—by the noted Franciscan missionary, Fr. Antonio Caballero, who had been working on the mainland of China since 1633. For he is known to have returned to Manila briefly in 1648—four years after the fall of the Ming Dynasty, and two years before the execution of this painting.<sup>11</sup>

It would have taken nearly two years for such a thing to get from Manila to Seville. First, it would have had to be carried over to New Spain (Mexico) by the Acapulco Galleon—as described in the previous article—then transferred to muleback to cross the mountainous backbone of Mexico in order to reach another port, from which a trans-Atlantic galleon could convey it on to Spain. If it had only recently arrived in Seville, an outstanding example of the Chinese artistry in silk would have been a great novelty, arousing considerable popular interest. As such, it would have been certain to catch the eye of an unusually observant artist, even if it had not been shown to him directly, as a newly arrived treasure.<sup>12</sup>

To conclude, this pattern from a Ming mandarin square in Murillo's dated painting provides additional evidence to prove that, during the Seventeenth century, mandarin squares from Ming China somehow reached Manila, to be conveyed to other parts of the Spanish Empire, where they were able to influence local artists and designers. We have already seen, in the previous article, how the tapestry-makers in Colonial Peru sometimes copied the animals or birds from the mandarin squares: either taking them directly as motifs for their own creations, or else using them as models for new animals and birds "in the Chinese manner." Probably these appealed to both the Peruvian designer and his patron because of their exotic charm recalling far-off places, and their own decorative quality: the same considerations that doubtless influenced Murillo when he chose this particular pattern to decorate the tablecloth in his "Marriage Feast at Cana."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See S. Cammann, "Chinese Influences in Colonial Peruvian Tapestries," *The Textile Museum Journal*, Vol. I, no. 3, December, 1964, pp. 21-34.

<sup>2</sup> The original title in Spanish was *Las Bodas de Caná*. See Juan Antonio Gaya Nuño, *La Pintura Española fuera de España*, Madrid, 1958, pp. 241-242, no. 1858.

<sup>3</sup> The Ming regulations concerning mandarin squares were discussed by the writer in an article entitled "The Development of the Mandarin Square," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. VIII, no. 2, 1944, p. 75, ff.

<sup>4</sup> The birds and animals of rank, and the ways of representing them on the insignia, are described by the writer in "Chinese Mandarin Squares," *University Museum Bulletin* (Philadelphia), Vol. XVII, no. 3, pp. 17-25. See also the pictures of them on pp. 45-60.

<sup>5</sup> The techniques of embroidery employed in making the Ming mandarin squares are discussed by the writer in "Embroidery Techniques in Old China," *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America*, Vol. XVI, 1962, pp. 18-24.

<sup>6</sup> See note 4, above.

<sup>7</sup> The Silver Pheasant (*Gennaeus nycthemus*, L.) is fully described in Wm. Beebe, *A Monograph of the Pheasants*, Vol. II, London, 1921, pp. 67-8. See also Plate XXVII, facing p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> The general changes in Chinese costume after the coming of the Manchus, and the founding of the Ch'ing Dynasty, are discussed by the writer in *China's Dragon Robes*, New York, 1962, pp. 20-26, ff.

<sup>9</sup> See "Development of the Mandarin Square," pp. 79-89, for the Ch'ing laws regarding mandarin squares.

<sup>10</sup> For a fuller description of this type of mandarin square, see "Embroidery Techniques," pp. 25-26.

<sup>11</sup> For Fr. Antonio Caballero, otherwise known as Fr. Antonio de Santa Maria, see K. S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China*, New York, 1929, pp. 108-111, and A. S. Rosso, *Apostolic Legations to China of the Eighteenth Century*, Pasadena, 1948, p. 105, ff. The latter, p. 114, mentions his return to Manila in 1648.

<sup>12</sup> The various accounts of Murillo's life and work stress the fact that he concentrated on representing the more popular religious subjects in terms of everyday life, drawing his models and other details from the people and things that he saw around him in Seville. See, for example, E. Harris, *Spanish Painting*, Paris, 1937, p. 19.

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Mrs. Jefferson Patterson and Mrs. John A. Logan watching Begum Ahmed present a \$2,000 check to Huntington Cairns, President of the Textile Museum. The gift represents proceeds from "A Festival of Pakistan Fabrics," sponsored by His Excellency the Pakistan Ambassador and

Begum Ahmed and arranged by the Friends of Pakistan, for the benefit of the Textile Museum, in the museum gardens on May 18, 1965. The gift will be used for the installation of a Rug Study Room in the museum annex. *Photograph by Col. Osmund L. Varela.*